

Psychology Reinforced by Religion

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I.

IT is a mistake to think that psychology can function quite apart from religion; and still more a mistake to think that psychology and religion are opposed. For they fit together hand and glove.

The greatest tenet of modern psychology is, I suppose, the so-called "reservoir" doctrine; which is, namely, that the latent powers inherent in human nature are so vast that, in comparison with what is normally expressed, they are almost unlimited. Along with this go the theories of the unconscious and the extraordinarily interesting shift in emphasis from reason and will to imagination as the prime controller of human energy.

So long as a man honestly believes that he can do thus and thus, nothing (say the psychologists) is

impossible—"within reason." Conversely, the thing that inhibits our powers is Fear.

We are all indebted to modern psychology for its plain recognition of the great, common bugbear, Fear. We are all a prey to it. We are all shot through with a thousand phobias. We are all more or less cowards at heart. Indeed, some of us are such cowards that we are afraid to acknowledge it. We do not dare to admit it even to ourselves.

That stupendous "modern psychologist" Gautama Buddha saw this plainly. He had only the desires of our unregenerate humanity to contemplate; he saw that every one of our merely natural desires is, in one aspect, the fear lest we may not achieve or retain the desired object; and he recognized the plain fact that all such desire is feverish. It is, indeed, the main-spring of our natural (as contrasted with "supernatural") actions, but it is not, in the least, to be considered as a vital energy.

After all, a main-spring is a cramped, dead thing—doomed speedily to inertia. And that feverish human activity which is based on the conflict of the passions carries within it the seed of its own prostration. "The end of these things is death."

Fear, then, as psychology rightly postulates, is

the throttler of power and progress. If we learn to get rid of fear, we can grow and expand to the nth power. But—how get rid of it? In propounding this question we touch the point where modern psychology fails.

"Relax," says the psychologist. "Do not be afraid. Just relax, and see how well you can do things."

Dear reader, have you ever tried to relax?

So have I.

I have tried and squirmed and twisted and strained to relax till my muscles twitched. As a very practical American psychologist puts it, "the worst of all strains is the strain not to strain."

When you could not get to sleep at night, for example, have you not, sometimes, just quietly tried to "Relax"? And, after you have tried it, for an hour and a half, let us say, or two hours, in each and all of the most thoroughly approved methods you have read about, was not the blessed gift of slumber further from you than when you began?

"Relax!"

I wonder if any of you, amid the throes of hell upon earth which are popularly known under the title of nervous prostration, has ever had the experience of being told that it was really a mistake to

worry; that one would feel so much better if only he would allow himself to become inwardly calm, that there was nothing really the matter with him—"just nerves." "Just nerves"! Just dynamite and nitroglycerine and amalgamated superessences of gunpowder! Just nerves!

It is altogether true that relaxation is the crux of the whole matter. There are hidden stores of energy in every one of us, ample and over-abundant for our needs and the sole key that is required to unlock these buried treasures is to relax.

But—how to relax? It is at this point, precisely, that modern psychology fails.

Let us sum up what we have said thus far. To begin with, then, we are all endowed with potentialities of every variety far exceeding our actual output of power. Modern psychology shows us plainly that what inhibits these forces is fear. In order to exercise them successfully we must conquer fear. But how to conquer fear, psychology cannot tell us.

II.

FOR this we must turn to religion. And we shall find that, where psychology fails, religion does

not fail. In a concrete forthright way which any man, high or low, rich or poor, lettered or unlettered, can adopt, religion knows how to hurl aside the debris of fear which has choked the wells of our powers.

Christ teaches us how to relax.

But let us not go too far, and spoil our claims by needless exaggeration.

It is only fair to admit, in the first place, that to speak of psychology as failing is rather suggestive than accurate. Since the sphere of science is to describe and not to motivate, we ought not to expect psychology to supply a living energy; whereas religion is life itself, at its highest and hottest. Psychology has really succeeded when it shows us how to couple one's energy effectually with this world's business. It is not its business, nor is it within its power, to supply the energy itself.

Moreover, though one is tempted to say that the Christian Religion must be the basis of all effective self-expression and psychotherapy, and that apart from it practical psychology falls short, the statement would be true only theoretically. According to the rough and ready measures of actual living it is not true.

That is to say, psychologists are constantly achieving magnificent work-a-day results, without looking to religion for any assistance whatever.

Broadly speaking, with regard to this matter of getting rid of fear, the "nerve-specialist" has two methods. By one he tries to "rebury" phobias in the subconscious; by the other he seeks to extract them as though they were splinters.

The first method is by far the more simple and superficial; consisting, as it does, in rest, recreation, and a general change in environment—any and every device that will build up the general health and divert the mind from the particular bug-bear which obsesses it. In thousands of cases a trip to the hills or the sea is sufficient inspiration and diversion to allow "the tired muscles of the mind to relax" while the ugly phobia sinks down, and is once again lost in the recesses from whence it came.

It is still there, however, ready to leap forth like a beast of prey, when the bank clerk again takes to keeping overlong hours at his desk, or the college professor tackles a course too many for the second time.

By far the more ship-shape method, therefore, is to get rid of that particular phobia, once and for

all, by psycho-analysis; which is to say that when, by the skilful assistance of the analyst, the subject recognizes and faces in the full daylight of his consciousness, the ancient (and often ridiculous) cause of his terror, the latter perishes for lack of food. When once I am convinced that my deep-rooted horror of the twilight is quite unmistakably the relic of that long-forgotten childhood experience in which I mistook my nurse's black cloak for a bear, the romance of my panic diminishes.

Where this method succeeds, it restores the patient to the ranks, where, with the rest of us, he struggles along as best he may. The particular stimulus to terror has been removed; and, the pirate chief being made to walk the plank, the remaining rabble are not utterly uncontrollable. Thus one becomes again, according to our pathetic phraseology, a "normal human being."

There are times, however, when this method fails too. There are times when patient and analyst dig deep down to a fear that resides at the centre of our nature, that terrible root-fear, of which all other fears are, after all, merely the expressions and symbols; that terror of self, that terror of God, that

terror of the universe—which haunts us all, if not in its open nakedness then subtly, in a thousand different disguises. It is this cosmic terror which is the skeleton in the closet of the soul, the awful secret of each member of our fallen and rebellious race.

Psychotherapy may palliate this terror. It may snatch away the particular horrid mask with which the spectre is, for the moment, invested. But the spectre remains at the bottom of each man's heart, until it is exorcized by the power of religion.

After all, the universe is a big thing. The bravest man and the strongest looks very puny when he stands, with his little sword drawn, over against the cosmos. And the bravest and strongest man knows it. It shows what children we are that we should attempt such a warfare at all. Strut as we may, our childish hearts are frightened, and cannot be otherwise, until we throw down our wooden weapons and bury our heads in the strong arms of our Father.

During recent years, I have read some scores of books by psychologists and pseudo-psychologists on "How to Conquer Fear." There have been numerous helpful suggestions, (as for example, to medi-

tate somewhat on Power, not to forget to play, and to strive to make positive, rather than negative, suggestions and auto-suggestions). But the great, underlying "suggestion" that I get from this welter of literature is that I myself, and the authors, are in a panic at the terrorfulness of the universe—else, why such pother?

III.

IT is Christ, with his proclamation of God's Fatherhood, who holds the essential antidote to fear. All other cults and philosophies are effective just in so far as they are conformable to this fundamental dogma of religion. And it is the practical method of applying this dogma to the fears and dilemmas of our everyday existence which we propose in this article to study.

For, ultimately, there is only one basis for relaxation which is completely reasonable and therefore effective; namely, the conviction that, behind the multifarious forces which surround us, there is a Being who loves each individual among us with a tender, personal love, and who is competent to protect us. As this conviction grows, and one

enters into "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," the obstruction is removed from that interior reservoir of forces which psychology recognizes but cannot fully release.

What, then, is a practical method by which this conviction can be fostered and made to assume a controlling influence in our lives? Fortunately, the answer is forthright, practicable, and simple; as it ought to be, in view of its all-importance. For the answer is Pain.

We all must encounter pain. Fear itself is the very quintessence of pain. And Christ's proposal to us—the proposal of the Master both of religion and psychology—is to accept pain for the love of the Father.

Of course, some pain we can and ought to avoid, but there must always be, in the life of every man, an abundant residuum which cannot or ought not be avoided. And this very pain, which may not be abolished, can (by the help of prayer and the sacraments) be embraced. With the embrace comes peace; and it cannot come, ultimately and absolutely, in any other way whatsoever. No path of roses, but the way of the Cross, is the road to the Resurrection. Shrink from it as we may, we must learn

this lesson, before we can grow up into the full, free exercise of our powers. And it is because Christ saw this, taught this, and lived this, that he is the world's Teacher par excellence.

The next time you lie awake in bed, try this. Instead of kicking against the pricks, and striving to sleep, through enforced relaxation or what not, speak to the Father, as Christ spoke in the Garden. You need not hesitate to ask for the gift of sleep, but ask for it with the reservation made by the Master, "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done."

Tell God that, if it is best that you should lie awake all night, for His sake you are willing. "The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" What a little share it is, after all, in our Lord's Cross!

Remember, too, that your willingness to bear suffering, however slight, is itself a power; and that, not only for yourself, but for others. It is the most potent form of prayer. As Christ died on the Cross to redeem the world, so you may offer your wakefulness on behalf of countless sufferers, in sick rooms and hospitals. And through your voluntary sacrifice, by the invisible working of God, they will

be strengthened. This is no extravagant assertion. It is an axiom of our religion, which links us together in a common whole.

However, I am not here concerned with religion, simply, but with its relation to psychology. I want not to preach about our Christian duties, but to show what is the psychological effect of their fulfilment; and this, in the most concrete of matters.

Thus, when once we have really reconciled ourselves to the loss of sleep, psychology can promptly tell us what will tend to be the result. The strain to relax having been removed, our normal functions will assert themselves, and we shall, in the very nature of things, fall asleep.

I am astonished that I have never run across a statement of this most obvious relationship between psychology and the doctrine of the Cross. As volume after volume, on a hundred kindred subjects has come from the press, I have searched expectantly for this fundamental teaching, but in vain. Splendid as many of the books have been, they have seemed to me to touch the connections between psychology and religion in what, compared to this, are superficial aspects.

According to some authors, it is religion that

must show its credentials, readjust its claims, and stand with its back to the wall. These rightly show, at all events, how much assistance religion can derive from psychology.

Other books approach from the opposite angle. They have splendid chapters on the psychotherapeutic effects of faith and on the putting forth of Christ's resurrection power toward the accomplishment of results in life here and now.

But the book which we most need, and which I sincerely trust will be written by someone better qualified than I, is a book which will show, both generally and in great practical detail, the essential relationship between pain (willingly borne) and power. It is only when we embrace pain, willingly, for the sake of a higher good, that we conquer it. Were we able to abolish pain (and fear) without first being willing to bear them, we would avoid, not conquer, them. We conquer death, only by meeting it face to face, and going through it.

The moment that we accept death, for love's sake, it loses its sting. But, more than this, the way is made clear for Resurrection! And this principle runs through the length and breadth of our life.

If I strain to remember a name, the harder I

strain, the more my memory fails me. If I am over-eager to deliver a good address, or to make a good impression socially, I instantly become self-conscious and stilted. If I strive too hard to impress my will, in a masterful way, upon others, the very effort belies itself and betrays my sense of weakness.

But if, for Christ's sake I am honestly willing to be weak, or a fool, or a failure, the powers of personality assert themselves, and I succeed.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." And again, "He that will be greatest among you, let him be as the least." These are the words of the Perfect Psychologist.

Of course, there would be an important chapter, in the book which I look for, on the need of sincerity. One cannot fool God or the secret interstices of one's own soul. I might strive with all my might to accept my cross, but if the motive at the bottom of my heart were to get rid of it, by accepting it, the acceptance would not be real, and results would not follow. Real relaxation of the innermost heart and mind can only come when the will itself is at peace; when it is in invisible possession of its most cherished object.

The basic reason, then, why Christianity affords a secure and universal foundation for all psycho-therapeutic and power principles is because it can assure the soul of an undisturbed possession of the Highest Good; and this coincidently with the utmost calamity. If one is really learning to love God, one is genuinely willing to accept the cup at his Hand; is genuinely willing to lie awake at night and even to make a fool of oneself for Christ's sake. God must honestly be the end, and the goods derived the by-products.

It is precisely for this reason that we must move ahead from psychology to religion.

IV.

FEAR cannot be eliminated by a direct attack. The very effort to get rid of it, however subtle, is itself inspired by fear—the fear of Fear, which is the worst of all fears. It is this very panic which inspires (and vitiates) so much that is written on the subject.

Fear, to be conquered, must be met by its counter-emotion, trust, or love. And this trust itself must be based on nothing less than a view of

the universe which is genuinely reassuring, the view which is given us by religion.

To conquer fear we must first be willing to embrace it. Religion gives us a reason for embracing it. For it shows us pain (fear itself included) as the infinitely sagacious and infinitely loving dispensation of God; by accepting which (in so far as we do not legitimately put it from us) we advance step by step in that calm conviction of personal security which is, in turn, the sole basis for the healthy development of our powers.

One cannot sufficiently emphasize the fact that these powers are, and in the nature of things must be, a by-product. To make them the direct object of our efforts is to produce strain and, therefore, inhibition. Religion alone, which gives us God as at once our goal and our secure possession, lifts us above the sphere of our subsidiary interests, and allows us to deal with them in peace. It is precisely through willingness to accept, for Christ's sake, pain, weakness, and failure, that these lose their sting and their consequent power to hamper us.

It is somewhat tragic that the people who would most appropriately benefit by this mutual interdependence between the Cross and modern psychol-

ogy are the very ones who deny it. It is the so-called "faith-healers" within the Christian community, whose constant asseveration is that sickness is not from God and that it is faithless and cowardly to try to accept it as such.

Nothing is further from my purpose than to attack these earnest and generous-minded men and women who are doing their utmost, however misguidedly, to restore to the Church that consciousness and exercise of spiritual power which its Master undoubtedly bequeathed. I simply deplore the fact that, by denying the practical implications of the doctrine of the Cross, they are undermining rather than supporting the power of the Resurrection.

It is true that we need to claim that power. It is true that we ought to preach Christ more as the Healer not only of men's souls but of their bodies. It is true that the ideal Christian attitude is not one of supine indifference to this world's good.

But it is emphatically not true that we should teach men that God's will is never revealed through sickness. It is precisely such one-sided doctrine which (as I know from bitter experience) produces strain—the strain to believe and to exercise one's

belief by casting sickness away. And it is this very strain which, again and again, hinders Christ's healing power. Whereas the prayer in the Garden—that prayer which pressed up from the midst of the awful death-grip in the Heart of Christ between cosmic fear and loyalty to the Father—is the antidote to strain. So are those wonderful words which followed it: "the cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Of course this loving dispensation of pain is a mystery—involved in the still more awful mystery of sin. But it is a healing mystery for those who accept it.

Whoever insists on understanding to the full, the reasons why so loving a Father should afflict so loving a Son, or why, indeed, he should permit any of us to suffer; whoever insists on having the problem of evil cleared away before giving God his allegiance, will not know the ministrations of that angel whom God sent to comfort Christ in Gethsemane, and whom He still sends to every man, in turn, who has relinquished self-will.

Nor will such an one inherit that calm self-possession and power which (in complete fulfilment, forsooth, of the principles of modern psychology)

welled up in the heart of the Son of Man as he stepped forth from His prayer in the Garden.

Because Jesus was willing, for the Father's sake, to suffer the pangs of fear, fear had no power over Him. He no longer struggled against that dark wave beneath which He had sweat drops of blood. And the calmness with which He stood before Pilate was due to no Herculean "self-control" (in the ordinary sense of the word). It was due to the fact that love had faced even fear, and had conquered it by accepting it for the sake of the Father.

No man who has earnestly endeavored to take up his Cross for Christ's sake will fail to acknowledge the truth of what I have said. He will have proved, again and again, in his own experience, that strength comes through accepting the Cross.

This attitude, therefore, of complete submission to the Will of God—in failure as well as in success, in sickness as well as in health—is the attitude which we all (faith-healers, psychotherapists, priests, physicians, and laymen) should strive to adopt and to inculcate in others. Far from cutting against "the will to power," it is the only wholesome and ultimately effective basis, either for the development of personality, on the one hand, or, on the

other, of therapy, medicinal or psychic.

Let a man be taught, as the Church has always taught (but with vastly more conviction than has been its custom recently) that God is able to heal, either gradually or in the twinkling of an eye; and that, nevertheless, it may be His wise and merciful will to postpone such healing, or even (in this present, penitential life) to omit it altogether. Let a man be taught both these truths, the truth of the Cross and the truth of the Resurrection; and let him be led at one and the same time to pray, as Christ in the Garden prayed, for deliverance and yet that God's will be done. Let this mysteriously complex, but perfectly practicable attitude be induced, and the subject becomes as well prepared for a miracle of healing as human ministration can make him.

I shall not attempt to go into the theology of this matter. But I can testify, in closing, that I have found these principles to work, not once but a thousand times, in my own case and that of others.

During the preaching of missions in various places, disabled men and women have come to me asking if I really believed that God could cure them.

In some cases they themselves believed it,

strongly. In others, I sought to induce them to believe with all their hearts in Christ's healing power.

Then, we faced together the fact that the All-wise God might know that it was best for them not to be healed—that their sickness might well be the Cross which He trusted them to bear bravely for the sake of the world.

The sick man or woman confessed, received absolution, and expressed an entire willingness to bear the affliction, and cheerfully, if God so willed.

Then we set a day for him to make his Communion, with the special thought, or intention of asking for healing, but only in case that should be the best thing that could happen, in God's sight.

In other words, the whole object and endeavor was to encourage the soul to put himself completely in God's Hands.

I do not believe that God always answers this method of approach by the bestowal of physical healing. I fancy that pain, well borne, is too precious and potent a thing for God to remove it invariably. Perhaps He sometimes answers the prayer with an increased capacity for suffering. I do know, however, that in cases with which I myself have come in contact the sufferers were invariably healed.